DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 178 847 CG 013 961

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TITLE	Androgynous Gender Roles in Later Life: Conceptual Critique and Recommendations.
SPONS AGENCY	Administration on Aging (DHEW), Washington, D.C.; National Inst. of Mental Health (DHEW), Rockville, Md.
PUB DATE	7 Sep 79
GRANT	90-A-1013; NIMH-MH14670
NOTE	34p.; Paper presented at the Conference of the Gerontological Society (30th, San Francisco, California, November, 1978)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Androgyny; *Older Adults; *Role Theory; Self Concept; *Sex (Characteristics); *Sex Differences; *Sex Role; Social Science Research

ABSTRACT

Recent theoretical formulations by Gutmann and Sinnott about the nature of men's and women's roles in later life are critiqued on conceptual and empirical grounds. This paper proposes a multidimensional conceptualization of gender role that stresses dynamic linkages between psychological and social psychological levels of analysis. Requisites of a model of androgynous gender role and its key methodological implications are identified. Subsequent discussion develops a sociological perspective on gender roles in old age by considering the joint effects of ageism and sexism, the pattern of role losses and continuities for each sex during the period of later life, and the impact of demographic change. (Author)

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ANDROGYNOUS GENDER ROLES IN LATER LIFE: CONCEPTUAL CRITIQUE AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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CG 013961

Paper presented at the meeting of the Gerontological Society, Dallas, Texas, November, 1978.

Support for this work was provided by grant MH14670 from NIMH and grant 90-A-1013 from the Administration on Aging.

The authors shared equally in the preparation of this paper.

Spurred by the contemporary feminist movement, much current research views extreme and rigid gender-role differentiation as detrimental to men and women alike. As theories and evidence call into question the accuracy and desirability of socially designating so many human characteristics as inherently either "feminine" or "masculine," androgyny is commonly touted as an alternative. Kaplan and Bean (1976) describe androgyny as a state of well-being that draws from valued characteristics of both so-called masculinity and femininity, such that women and men can both retain the positive traits they prize, while broadening the option of adopting cross-gender-typed attributes and behaviors. Androgyny is said to facilitate situationally flexible behavior (Bem, 1974, 1975, 1976) and to foster more fully integrated human beings (Hefner, Rebecca and Oleshansky, 1975; Kaplan and Bean, 1976) than traditional gender roles. On the other hand, detractors of androgyny tend to emphasize the importance to psychological adjustment of clear-cut definitions of masculine and feminine attributes and behaviors, and thus take a dim view of any attenuation or blurring of gender-based distinctions.

The particular case of old people has been largely ignored in this literature on traditional gender roles and androgyny. Most researchers continue to concentrate on childhood and early adulthood; even those with explicit life-span developmental orientations tend to be vague about the period of late life (e.g., Block, 1973). Much of what we know about gender-roles and old age is limited to various cataloguings of male-female differences, and much of this knowledge is probably artifactual (Atchley, 1976).

Nonetheless, several explicit theoretical statements about gender roles in old age have recently been offered by scholars who adopt a life-span perspective. Sinnott (1977) argues that an individual's ability

to show life-span variation in gender roles indicates general flexibility, which in turn is associated with successful aging (longevity in particular). She concludes that androgyny, or "combined sex role," represents one aspect of superior psychological adjustment and positive adaptation to old age. We infer from her discussion, however, that the actual extent of such androgyny among the elderly is not known.

Gutmann (1975; 1977; 1978, Note 1), on the other hand, seems to view certain gender role changes as typical of late life. Gutmann (1975) identifies parenthood as the pivotal event in changing patterns of gender role relationships across the life span. He claims that gender roles become sharply differentiated during the early adulthood parenting years, as a response to vital needs of children, but that later, when parenting responsibilities end, there is a gender role reversal whereby "men reclaim title to their denied 'femininity' [and] women repossess the(ir) aggressive 'masculinity'" (p. 181). Gutmann terms this the "normal unisex of later life," and seems to regard it as a more or less automatic occurrence.

Sinnott's and Gutmann's papers raise some interesting questions: Are old people as traditional as younger ones, or do people develop androgynously as they age? Is androgyny associated with superior adjustment among the aged? Do changes in gender role identity accompany changes in gender role beliefs and behaviors? How do individuals abandon traditional gender role identities and develop androgynous ones? One purpose of this paper is to explore approaches to some of these and other questions pertinent to a critical examination of androgyny in old age.

In order to address this topic, we must first clarify the meaning of androgyny. Although the term "androgyny" has come into wide use, there is no consensus on its definition. For example, for Bem (1974) androgyny is

the balance of self-attributed positive masculine and positive feminine personality traits. Block (1973) endorses a broader definition which includes an individual's gender role values. Bernard (1975) defines androgyny as lack of conformity to a wide variety of gender stereotyped behaviors, while Johnson (1977), offering an even more expansive definition, states that androgyny is the relative lack of difference between the sexes with respect to attributes, traits, roles, and status positions.

An initial task of this paper, then, is to develop a more adequate conceptualization of androgyny to deal with present inconsistencies and confusion. In general, our perspective treats traditional gender role and androgyny as particular types of the more general construct "gender role." (Traditional gender role connotes specific gender appropriateness, e.g. men exhibiting a masculine role and women exhibiting a feminine role. Cross gender role implies taking on the traditional gender role of the opposite sex.) In the following section, we identify several components of androgynous gender role, stressing dynamic linkages between sociological and psychological levels of analysis, then suggest requisites of a model of androgyny and its key methodological implications. This conceptualization necessarily focuses more on androgynous than on traditional gender roles, in order to provide an appropriate framework for our subsequent exploration of androgyny in later life and of the work of Sinnott and Gutmann in particular.

Conceptualization of Gender Role

Trait Model of Androgyny

Bem (1974) has developed the most prominent conceptualization and measure of androgyny. She defines androgyny as the balance of positive masculine and positive feminine qualities within the individual; the Bem Sex-Role Inventory (BSRI) (Bem, 1974) measures this concept. On this scale,

respondents indicate the extent to which a set of positive masculine and positive feminine personality traits are self-descriptive. Ratings from masculine traits are averaged to produce one masculinity score and ratings from feminine traits are averaged to produce one femininity score. Androgynous individuals are those who have relatively high scores on both masculinity and femininity. (Masculine individuals have a relatively high masculinity score and a relatively low femininity score. Feminine individuals are the reverse.) The BSRI has been used in numerous studies (Jones, O'Chernovetz and Hansson, 1978) and has stimulated much theoretical work (Androgyny Conference, Note 2).

The trait model of androgyny is appealing. Its definition of gender role identity is straightforward. The BSRI is convenient for respondents and investigators alike; it is readily completed and the resultant data are convenient for statistical analysis. Despite these advantages, the trait conceptualization of gender role identity (Burke and Tully, 1977) and the BSRI, in particular, have questionable validity and generalizability. Among its limitations, the BSRI (a) allows no understanding of the personal meaning or salience of traits to the respondent. Moreover, the exclusive attention to gender role traits precludes consideration of other salient psychological and social psychological aspects of gender role; (b) generally ignores how these self-descriptions may change by situation (cf. Tucker, 1966); (c) by providing global indices of masculinity and femininity, may in fact tap social desirability response biases more effectively than what it purports to measure. In the final analysis, these global indices may entail such gross distinctions as to be of little use. Spector (1975, Note 3) takes this

point of view in asserting that:

> Rather than trying to develop an overall measure of sex-role like the BSRI, it would seem more fruitful to begin by defining the differential expectations for men and women in one role or realm of behavior (e.g., sexual partner, spouse) by first defining salient attributes and behaviors. Then one could dimensionalize these with respect to adaptation, preference and identity (p. 25).

A further shortcoming of the trait approach is that it is not typically oriented toward understanding intra-individual change (Hefner, Rebecca and Oleshansky, 1975). Premised on situation-free self-attributions of relatively enduring personality traits, this approach is ill equipped to deal with development.

In sum, a narrow focus on personality descriptions via gender stereotyped traits is essentially static and has questionable generalizability to everyday behavior. Although Bem never intended to assess the personal salience of masculinity and femininity or the ways in which they change across time and situations, a conceptualization of androgyny which addresses these issues is essential for meaningful analysis of gender role in a complex, changing society.

Requirements for an Alternative Approach

The above critique of the trait model provides a basis for discussing an alternative conceptualization of gender role, and of androgynous gender role in particular. A more adequate conceptualization would meet the following criteria:

(1) Gender role should be phenomenologically grounded (Beeson, 1975). Taking into account people's own definitions and interpretations of gender role permits assessment of how these definitions change across time and situations, their impact on gender role behavior, and their relationship to other dimensions of self-concept.

(2) Gender role should be defined in reference to actual relationships, situations, and the performance of specific actions. These definitions should be framed with the recognition of differences among awareness of social stereotypes, endorsement of those stereotypes, and beliefs about appropriate or typical behavior for oneself. This will help prevent the reification of the constructs of gender role (Thorne, 1976) and androgyny so prevalent in the literature. Together with the phenomenological grounding, this practice will temper the tendency to focus on between-sex-differences to the neglect of within-sex-differences (Bernard, 1973) by highlighting the tremendous range of personality, attitudinal and behavioral variation.

(3) Different components of gender role, for example, gender role identity, gender role beliefs and gender role behaviors, should be kept conceptually separate and the relationships among them treated as an empirical question (Wells, Note 5). This separation will prevent the often unwarranted extrapolation from evidence on gender role stereotypes to individual attitudes and behavior and allow the identification of the inevitable inconsistencies in beliefs and behaviors (Deutscher, 1973).

Multidimensional Conceptualization of Gender-Role

With the above requirements as a point of departure, the multidimensional conceptualization of gender role outlined below is offered as an alternative to the trait approach. In this scheme, there are three components of gender role: gender role identity, gender role beliefs, and gender role behavior. Gender role identity constitutes an individual's gender role self-concept -- an individual's statements about some set of so-called masculine and feminine qualities typical of oneself. These are qualities the person believes expresses his or her basic gender role identity. Gender role beliefs cover a

wide range of attitudes concerning how others behave, how they should behave, and more general views about the roles of men and women. Gender role identity is a set of beliefs about the self whereas gender role beliefs are beliefs about others. Gender role behavior is behavior that has been deemed as more appropriate for only one sex.

Gender role represents normative expectations about various social roles. These normative expectations serve as guidelines for conceptualization and empirical work. We stress, though, that the specific content of those roles must be based on a given group's own definition and interpretation of their experience. A phenomenological underpinning of this concept both minimizes response bias due to social desirability of espousing beliefs in equality between the sexes (Tavris, 1973) and incorporates the diversity and complexity of gender role.

Each component of gender role can be defined in terms of androgyny. An individual with an androgynous identity is one whose identity is not exclusively defined in terms of traditional gender role qualities but, rather, a wide range of positive qualities reflecting both traditional roles. Androgynous beliefs are those which reflect the basic ideological premise that individuals should not be arbitrarily limited on the basis of sex and gender. An androgynous behavioral style is a flexible style, a style in which behaviors are <u>not limited to</u> traditional ones. This multidimensional conceptualization of androgyny assumes that <u>individuals may vary in the way in which they are androgynous</u> as, for example, a woman who espouses traditional gender role beliefs but who exhibits an androgynous behavioral style in her work and family life. (The most stringent definition of androgyny, however, would require a demonstration of androgyny in all three components.)

The different components of gender role exist on a somewhat different level of analysis. Identity is largely psychological in nature while beliefs and behaviors might be termed social psychological. These components, viewed as interactive, are kept distinct for heuristic purposes.

Identity, beliefs and behavior are not only interdependent but they are also affected by social structure. For example, female dependence (and consequent lack of power and status) within marriage and family relationships is reinforced by education and employment discrimination, provisions of family law, and cultural stereotypes of "woman's place." Attention to the larger social context and institutionalized patterns of sex and gender inequality, in particular, is important to a study of gender role. With respect to androgyny, it is clear that our sex-and gender-stratified society works to maintain traditional roles to the detriment of androgynous ones. Opportunities for cross-gender-role behaviors, general life style flexibility, and social support for non-traditional beliefs and behaviors are limited. Although androgyny may be associated with greater individual flexibility and personal integration, the nature of our sex-and gender-stratified society and its effects on personality alerts us to the need to assess the costs associated with maintaining a deviant, i.e. androgynous, identity in our society. For example, if women as an aggregate are systematically blocked from assuming prominent and responsible roles in business and the public sector, we can reasonably expect negative attitudes toward female bosses and leaders and feelings of anxiety and self-doubt on the part of these atypical women (Kanter, 1977).

The proposed conceptualization of androgyny has some decided advantages. It aids in determining whether researchers are talking about the same thing, regardless of their terminological differences, and it provides a more comprehensive vantage point from which to assess focused investigations. The

phenomenological-interactionist emphasis on social construction of everyday life (Berger and Luckman, 1967; McCall and Simmons, 1978) adds to researchers' understanding. Take the relationship between beliefs and behavior, for example: gender role reversal typically refers to the case where role definitions (an aspect of gender role beliefs) remain constant but role occupants trade places (often temporarily). Performance of cross-gender-role behaviors in such a reversal provides prima facie evidence of behavioral androgyny, but traditional role definitions may remain upheld by the people who have exchanged places (e.g., "I'm playing housewife this week because my wife is out of town"). As a further example, androgynous role definitions and putative traditional gender role behaviors may also coexist, as in the case where a division of labor between spouses negotiated on the basis of respective skills and interest (i.e., not on the basis of sex) just happens to match a division of labor typical of traditional gender roles.

Further, this multidimensional conceptualization of gender-roles discourages a reductionistic treatment of any single component and draws attention to possible contradictions or inconsistencies among them. As gender role contradictions are undoubtedly an impetus to gender role change (Wells, Note 5), this approach is crucial to an analysis of gender role development. And, finally, this separation of gender role components both emphasizes and facilitates a study of their interactive nature, e.g. how gender role identity develops through social relations and in turn influences subsequent interaction (McCall and Simmons, 1978).

Methodological Implications

The major methodological implications of our formulation are sketched summarily:

Methods and measurement. In general, we advocate multiple methods, or triangulation, (Denzin, 1978) as the most defensible research strategy. Field studies (e.g. Hochschild, 1973; Matthews, 1979), unobtrusive measures, experimental manipulation, small pilot studies, interviews and questionnaires--all these can contribute to better understanding of androgyny in old age, particularly when used jointly in designs that balance off their respective limitations. Moreover, a diversity of techniques will likely be essential to address the various components of our multidimensional scheme.

At present, however, studies of gender role tend to rely heavily on highly structured instruments that neglect respondents' situated perspectives and interpretive processes. This not only limits our understanding of the meaning of sex and gender in our society, but also no doubt accounts for much of the contradictory evidence on the advantages of androgyny to psychological adjustment (Jones et al., 1978). We recommend that future research give more attention to descriptive work that includes unstructured interviewing, and to field studies of the "grounded theory" genre (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) in which theory and observation evolve in tandem. These unstructured explorations might address such issues as: What is the phenomenological significance of gender role?; How closely do the researchers' and respondents' understandings of constructs and terminology correspond?; Do role definitions vary by situation and across time?; What individuals and events affect conceptions of gender role?

Structured measures and laboratory studies can build upon responses to such questions, systematically obtain more information, and control for response biases. Information best gathered through these methods includes responses to pre-determined sets of specific gender role related beliefs and observations of specific gender role behaviors. In keeping with our recommendation to keep beliefs and behaviors conceptually distinct, gender role behaviors should not be inferred from self-report behavioral intentions or attitudinal measures, but should be observed in a variety of natural and experimental settings. Moreover, behavioral observations should be made over time (Schuman and Johnson, 1978), as single observations are less reliable and provide little basis for assessments of androgynous gender role behavior.

Sampling limitations and data considerations. Data collection techniques and the generalization of findings should take into account that the meaning of gender role differs by age/life stage, sex, social class, cohort, race/ethnicity, education, employment status, etc. Samples should be designed with particular attention to characteristics which theory or past research suggest may affect gender role. Some of these characteristics are social structural. In keeping with our emphasis on the effects of sex and gender inequality, data should be obtained on individuals' opportunities for androgynous behavior, general life style flexibility, and extent of perceived social support for androgynous beliefs and behaviors. These data should be interpreted with reference to institutionalized patterns of sex and gender inequality.

We recognize that individual researchers are not in a position to implement the above methodological recommendations in entirety. Rather, these proscriptions are intended to call attention to the need for more field studies, to guard against over-generalization of findings obtained

at one point in the developmental process of research, and to work toward a context in which researchers who are working on disparate parts of this topic can converse, with each recognizing his or her particular contribution to an overall effort.

Critique of Existing Theories

With these conceptual clarifications and methodological recommendations in mind, androgyny in old age will be examined, with special emphasis on the work of Sinnott and Gutmann. The reader should bear in mind that neither Sinnott nor Gutmann present their formulations as theories about androgyny in late life; in fact, neither routinely uses the term "androgyny." Nevertheless, they have made the most explicit theoretical statements about gender roles in old age presently available.

Gutmann: The Normal Unisex of Late Life

Drawing heavily on his interpretations of TATs collected in several cultures, Gutmann (1975, 1977, 1978) claims that gender role differentiation is sharpest during active parenting years and then wanes during old age. According to Gutmann, parenthood impels each sex to surrender to the other certain sex typed qualities that might interfere with children's welfare. As he puts it:

> Male providers of physical security give up the dependency needs that would interfere with their courage and endurance; these they live out through identification with their wives and children...[W]omen, the providers of emotional security, give up the aggression that could alienate their male providers or that could damage a vulnerable and needful child. But as...the chronic sense of parental emergency phases out... [m]en recapture the[ir] femininity"...and women generally become more domineering and independent. In effect, "masculine" and "feminine" qualities are distributed not only by sex but by life period (1977: 31).

Gutmann calls this reversal the "normal unisex of later life."

His ambiguous terminology complicates an assessment of Gutmann's position. At first glance, an androgynous ideal seems implicit in his notions of projection, reclamation, repossession and even the term "unisex." On close inspection, however, it appears that Gutmann is talking not about men and women both becoming more androgynous in late life, rather he is talking about men becoming feminized and women becoming more masculinized. As he puts it:

> An impressive turnover of sex-roles takes place (in post-parental years), wherein there is some relinquishment of these personal qualities that were previously conserved for the self, in exchange for those that were partialled out to the mate (Gutmann, 1978: 12--italics added).

Gutmann himself does not clearly differentiate among identity, beliefs, and behaviors. "Femininity," "masculinity," "sex role" and "unisex" are all used with reference to clusters of traits reflecting traditional gender roles and, as such, his theory centers on the psychological level of analysis. Personality changes are attributed to the cessation of a single type of behavior, i.e., parenting. In effect, Gutmann describes a life span pattern of gender role complementarity for couples: in early and middle adulthood, males have masculine personalities and females have feminine personalities; in old age, males have feminine personalities and females have masculine personalities. Moreover, he claims that this pattern of reversal is universal, transcending historical and cultural differences.

Gutmann's theory and the evidence presented to support it have serious flaws. The theory rests on several untenable assumptions. He uncritically assumes biological determinism of gender roles (e.g., 1978, p. 5), thereby ignoring extensive documentation of cross-cultural differences in gender roles and numerous critiques of the tendency to read women's social roles directly from their biology (Reiter, 1975; Wortis, 1971; Quinn, 1977). A

traditional conjugal relationship is also presupposed, i.e., Gutmann's view of family dynamics rests on the "ideal" modern Western pattern of one male supporting a dependent wife and minor children. Such a theory cannot explain conformity (or lack of it) to traditional gender roles by childless couples, single parents, single adults or dual career families. Thus, his theory disregards statistics about actual American family composition (Ferriss, 1970), as well as cross-cultural documentation of the myriad patterns of kinship, residence, division of labor, etc. (Slocum, 1975; Schlegel, 1977; Giele and Smock, 1977). Gutmann's description of the transition to unisex in old age also rests upon his questionable assumption of the stereotyped modern, American nuclear family: as parental responsibilities wane, there is a dismanteling of role specialization. How this happens is unclear; Gutmann asserts simply that a husband and wife "engender mutual change."

The parental imperative argument is supported by weak and limited evidence consisting mainly of interpretations from TATs collected in several societies. The dubious reliability and validity of projective measures such as TATs is widely acknowledged (Selltiz, Wrightsman and Cook, 1976); they are best used in combination with other data collection techniques. The inherent weakness of Gutmann's data base is compounded by his reliance on small samples and his failure to provide details on sampling procedures, sociodemographic characteristics of respondents, the precise nature of stimulus materials, procedures, coding categories, and reliabilities.

More generally, applying our conceptualization of androgyny to Gutmann's work reveals that his approach is too narrowly focused. Gender role identity is discussed to the exclusion of gender role beliefs and behaviors and parental roles to the exclusion of other family and work

roles. Parental roles are a prominent underpinning of traditional gender roles but they are not the only ones nor do they exist in a social vacuum. An adequate model of the impact of decline in parenting responsibilities on gender roles would need to discuss process and mechanisms of change, and incorporate relevant features of present day society, such as extensive labor force participation by women and the secular decline in the length of active parenthood as a proportion of the total life span (Van Dusen and Sheldon, 1977).

Sinnott: Flexibility, Longevity and Role Blurring

In common with Gutmann, Sinnott talks in vague terms about blurring of gender roles in old age, concentrating on psychological phenomena, like personality characteristics, but implying behavioral change as well. Sinnott is more programmatic than Gutmann and she emphasizes process. She argues that a person's ability to show life-span variations in gender roles is an indication of general flexibility, which in turn is related to "successful" aging and a longer life span. She uses a dialectical approach in suggesting that biological, psychological and cultural tasks and expectations conflict for older adults. Flexible older adults are more likely to survive. Androgyny is never clearly defined; it is referred to as "combined male/female role" and "a blurring of distinctions between males and females."

The evidence cited to support the specific notion that androgyny contributes to successful aging is mainly psychological (data derived from Rorschach tests, longitudinal personality assessments, Thematic Apperception Tests (TATs) and measures of personality adjustment) and suffers from a number of limitations. For example, comparisons of middle aged and older people's stories about an old man and an old woman depicted in a TAT (Neugarten

and Gutmann, 1958) may provide evidence about stereotypes but they do not permit inferences about how old people describe themselves or actually behave. Moreover, longevity per se is a dubious criterion of flexibility and, indirectly, androgyny, and there are problems of sampling and external validity, such as the generalizability of results from clinical samples. We are also mindful of Atchley's (1976) caution about spurious sex differences, since socio-demographic characteristics of respondents are not well reported in the literature cited. Finally, we suspect that between-sex differences are highlighted to the neglect of within-sex variation.

Overall, then, Sinnott's approach is provocative, but the theorizing tends to outrun available evidence. Dialectical processes are invoked but only briefly elaborated, components of androgyny are used interchangeably, and the linkages among identity, beliefs and behaviors remain unclear. In particular, the features of late life experience that may be salient to gender role change are never described. She suggests that "the older person's biological needs would most likely be congruent with equivalent male/female roles and psychological needs with disparate roles" (1977: 461), but she does not explain why. She also notes that "sex roles seem to be a category of traditions maintained by the old individual in spite of their general lack of relevance" (1977: 460), but does not explain why they are no longer relevant. Finally, there is ambiguity about the appropriateness of rigidly defined gender roles at different life stages. Are such roles appropriate for younger adults but inappropriate for the aged? Parts of Sinnott's discussion suggest that the flexibility she describes is an asset at any life stage.

In sum, the work of Gutmann and Sinnott is flawed by ambiguous terminology, reliance on dubious evidence and a lack of attention to social and cultural

factors affecting gender roles. As a result, the usefulness of their theories to an understanding of gender roles in later life is limited. Neither theorist provides a conceptual framework that addresses the questions listed in the beginning of this paper that relate to the incidence, the development and the adjustment correlates of androgyny. In our view, examination of gender roles in old age requires a multidimensional conceptualization of gender role, a diversity of methods, new measures, and an examination of the social conditions of old age that affect gender roles for both sexes.

Androgynous Gender Roles in Later Life

To discuss the conditions and meaning of gender roles in old age and to provide a framework within which to view androgynous gender roles in particular, this section outlines some salient features of gender roles in later life from a sociological perspective.

Role Losses and Continuities

Gender roles in later life involve the intersection of two separate social hierarchies, age and sex. Certain sex differences in gender role experiences and expectations in old age result from combined effects of ageism and sexism. The aged in our society are denigrated in part because they are no longer economically productive (Dowd, 1975). Since social expectations about productivity are sex linked, the impact of aging on gender roles differs for women and men. Economic responsibility for the family is strongly associated with the traditional male gender role. The loss of this activity at retirement has typically been regarded as an eventful and difficult transition for men only. Recently this view has been challenged. For example, a masculine bias in retirement research has been identified (Beeson, 1975) and empirical studies have shown employed older women to be quite work-oriented and affected by retirement (Atchley, 1976; Block et al., 1978). Hence, both men and employed

women suffer a status loss vis à vis the larger society upon retirement. Nonetheless, the net loss is greater for men, as an aggregate, because by social definition their investment in work is deemed more central and regarded more seriously.

Domestic and family responsibilities are strongly associated with the traditional female gender role. Older women may remain relatively home and family centered, yet gender role related aspects of their family life undergo some changes in later life. Losses experienced most heavily by women are the involvements in active parenting (Polatnick, 1975; and in marriage (since women are more at risk for widowhood than men, due to greater longevity, a tendency to marry men older than themselves, and lesser likelihood of remarriage).

The loss of economic productivity by men and family responsibilities by women erodes some of the key bases for sharp gender role differentiation characteristic of mid-life. This is particularly true for involvement in traditional gender role behaviors; effects on gender role beliefs and identity are less clear. The extensive literature on retirement suggests that many men view retirement as a threat to their sense of masculinity. Evidence about women's reactions to retirement as these pertain to gender role is sorely lacking. On the other hand, there is evidence that highly "feminine-typed" aged women are the most self-critical (Lowenthal, et al., 1975) and that the later years are more problematic for strongly family-centered women (Maas and Kuypers, 1974); such evidence is not surprising given our culture that rewards independence and career success but makes their attainment difficult for women.

Another activity that is intrinsically linked to life stage and may become less gender typed in old age is that of sexual partner. Widespread social denigration of old people, or ageism, includes a negative and inaccurate view of the elderly as essentially asexual (Pfeiffer, 1973; Verwoerdt et al., 1969; Masters and Johnson, 1966). Mass media provide many illustrations of the

idealized versions of youthful physical beauty that underlie the stereotypes of sexual attractiveness. The double standard of these stereotypes particularly penalizes women because their attractiveness rests largely on physical appearance and thus wanes much sooner than that of men, which rests more on personality, intelligence and career achievement (Sontag, 1972; Safilios-Rothschild, 1977; Block et al., 1978). It is possible, then, that the relatively early waning of sexual attractiveness for women may have some emancipating effects in freeing them from restrictive aspects of stereotyped gender role expectations.

Here again, we have more evidence about behaviors (e.g. data on continuation of sexual activity in old age) and about generally accepted, stereotyped beliefs (which run counter to much behavioral evidence), than we have about how people view their own sexual attitudes and behaviors vis à vis their gender role identity. We also know little about the impact of the stereotyped beliefs about others upon people's views of themselves.

Despite the predictable loss of some salient components of traditional gender-role behaviors and stereotyped beliefs, other elements remain to perpetuate gender differentiation in old age. For women, an important element is housework, a task associated with the traditional female role. While active parenting has a clearly defined end, housework does not. Although men do increase their home-oriented activities upon retirement, there is little evidence that domestic chores are widely shared by elderly couples. For example, Bellweg (1967) reports that retired husbands did not share tasks with their wives any more after retirement than before. Rather, they tend to take on full responsibility for a select group of behaviors typically performed by men.

Another underpinning of traditional gender role differentiation that continues through later life involves the subtleties of language and nonverbal behavior. Studies of the English language itself and of sex differences in paralinguistics (inflection, interrupting, nuance, etc.) describe a consistent devaluation of females and femininity (Henley and Thorne, 1975; Zimmerman and West, 1975), a devaluation reinforced by patterns of deference in nonverbal "body language" such as gestures and use of space (Henley, 1977).

These well-documented sex differences in conversational style and nonverbal behavior have been termed a special and highly visible case of the more basic phenomenon of power differentials. As Henley notes, the hesitations, qualifying phrases, less forceful delivery, tag questions, and superpolite forms termed "woman's speech" are characteristics that advertise the powerlessness of those who must constantly acknowledge their subordinate status. Studies of courtroom dialogue (Lind and O'Barr, 1977) suggest that "women's speech" may be more accurately termed "powerless speech." In general, social status (e.g., occupation, position of authority within a setting) should predict the speech pattern better than sex per se. The important point here is that variations in powerless speech patterns and nonverbal behavior may well accompany the waxing and waning of social status and prestige across the life span. Since old age is characterized by status losses (Rosow, 1972) we might expect these patterns to be more pronounced among the elderly than among younger adults. In line with our conceptualization of gender role, however, we would expect variations by situation and audience. For example, retired males may exhibit elements of woman's/powerless speech and greater deference in body language, particularly in

situations of objective dependency (e.g. nursing homes) and among social superiors. These behaviors might be less pronounced in the company of one's wife, women in general and social inferiors regardless of age. For example, a study of mixed sex discussion groups at senior centers documented male patterns of conversational control (Paulig and McGee, Note 4).

Each sex, then, loses and maintains different aspects of traditional gender roles in old age. As several key bases for traditional gender role differentiation are eroded in later life, many restrictions to cross gender role behaviors are loosened. With fewer restrictions, behavioral androgyny, in some senses, seems more feasible for older people than younger ones. Behavioral androgyny in old age also seems more likely for women than for men, partly because of differential motivation or payoff, and partly because of the unique role losses in the later years. As behaviors and qualities associated with the traditional male gender role tend to have higher status than those associated with the traditional female gender role, women have more to gain than men from increased participation in cross gender role behaviors, and thus may be more motivated to engage in them. As already noted, some role losses unique to women imply a lessening of female subjugation (viz., no longer considered to be sexual, older women may have greater latitude to deviate from prescribed roles) and so there may be fewer barriers to cross gender role behaviors for women as they age. On the other hand, such increased freedoms for women are perhaps tempered by the continuity of many lower status traditional role related expectations and behaviors (housework, verbal and nonverbal deference, etc.) into the period of old age. Further, there are no new and highly valued roles for women during this time. Bart's (1969) cross-cultural study shows that post-child-rearing roles that bring higher status to aged women (compared to younger women) are present in many other societies

but lacking or de-emphasized in our own. Clearly there is need for research on the complex interactions among role losses and continuities and their effects upon behavioral and attitudinal aspects of gender role.

Social Change and Gender Roles

Limited evidence and the underdeveloped state of theory about life span changes in gender roles make it hard to distinguish true life stage differences ("age") from unique historical experiences ("period") of particular age groups ("cohort"). Though acknowledging this age-period-cohort dilemma (Palmore, 1978), we can identify some historical forces, particularly demographic trends and the contemporary women's movement, that we expect may in time alter current patterns of gender role differentiation in old age.

Some (e.g. Hoffman, 1977; Giele, 1971) have argued that androgynous gender roles are the more or less inevitable outcome of certain contemporary historical, demographic and economic forces that are undermining traditional gender roles. Smaller family size, longer life expectancy and higher female employment rates are converging to diminish the length and overall (objective) importance of motherhood in the lives of women (Van Dusen and Sheldon 1977). Hoffman (1977) predicts that as people increasingly recognize the anachronistic nature of traditional gender roles, they will change childhood socialization practices and greater androgyny for both sexes will follow.

Of course, these demographic trends are not so salient to the present day cohort of elderly persons who lived through midlife under a different set of social conditions and a prevailing ideology that "woman's place is in the home." From a life span perspective, behavioral patterns, beliefs, and self-concepts acquired during earlier years influence one's way of life in later years. For example, statuses associated with traditional gender roles are carried over into old age when men continue to be defined

in terms of their jobs (a retired carpenter) and women, in terms of attributes and relationships (energetic, eighty-year-old grandmother of twelve; never mind that she's a retired teacher). In terms of an interaction between gender role beliefs and identity, the tendency of older women to be less accepting than younger ones of feminist ideology may rest in part on the difficulty of repudiating a long term investment in a traditional gender role identity that is suddenly declared by the women's movement to be unduly limiting. Older women may also feel that they have relatively little to gain by rocking the boat at a rather late date.

In fact, some of the key opportunities to engage in cross gender role behaviors, such as career participation by women and childcare by men, are not readily available to the elderly. Thus the nature of future gender role differentiation among aged women and men will be influenced by the life span continuities, or later life ramifications, of certain changes now occuring primarily among younger adults. These changes include the demographic trends noted above that Hoffman (1977) claims will eventually erode traditional gender roles. Certainly the opportunities, motivations and rewards for participating in cross gender role behaviors are important to the eventual development of androgynous gender roles. However, it is important in assessing Hoffman's claim that we contrast the impact on women and men. The demographic changes sketched above are more indicative and supportive of cross gender role behavior by women than men. Hoffman concedes that the shift of women toward work is far better documented that the shift of men toward childcare and housework. She remains hopeful nonetheless:

> The increase in the man's role as a parent can be expected from the press of the women's dual role of mother and wage earner. A decrease in the man's breadwinner role can be expected partly because that role is increasingly being shared with his wife,

> partly as an adjustment in the form of shorter work hours that also increase the number of jobs, and partly because of other changes in society that have affected man's achievement orientation (651).

Hoffman tends to overestimate the likelihood of trends toward male cross-gender-role behavior because she neglects the sociological level of analysis. Relying heavily on early socialization as the basis for adult gender role differentiation, Hoffman ignores implications of the power and prestige differences between masculinity and femininity, the ongoing socialization of adulthood, and various social control mechanisms that tend to lock people into traditional roles--anachronistic or not.

In general, then, demographic trends seem to point toward increasing cross-gender-role behavior by women and may consequently attenuate some aspects of gender role differentiation among future cohorts of elderly. It seems less clear how men's involvement in cross-gender roles may change, whether in accomodation to an expanded traditional female gender role, or independently, such as decreasing the emphasis on achievement orientation.

In any case, involvement in cross-gender-role behaviors is necessary but not sufficient for behavioral androgyny, as androgynous gender roles connote a range of behaviors performed in flexible, situationally effective and personally relevant ways.

Conclusion

Our discussion of the nature and meaning of gender roles suggests that a theoretical model of androgynous gender roles in old age should take account of the following:

(1) The benefits and costs associated with adherence to traditional

gender roles;

(2) The conditions under which traditional gender-roles are abandoned with particular attention to loosening of restrictions associated with those roles and differential experience for women and men.

(3) The opportunities for developing and maintaining an androgynous identity, beliefs and for displaying androgynous behavior;

(4) The conditions under which those opportunities are used with particular attention to the role of practice, individual ability, and systems of social support;

(5) The possible confounding of age, period and cohort (Palmore, 1978) when formulating theories about gender role change.

These issues should be examined at the psychological level (e.g. motivation, personality, ability), the social psychological level (e.g. family and occupational roles), and the sociological level (e.g. extent of social structural support for androgyny).

At present, the extent to which androgyny is more typical of older than younger people, the correspondence of androgyny with superior adjustment, and the ways in which individuals abandon traditional gender roles and develop androgynous ones is unknown. Although the theories of Gutmann and Sinnott address these questions, the answers they provide are insufficient; moreover, their work lacks convincing empirical verification. Examination of androgyny in old age requires formulation of a theory of gender role development in adulthood, a theory that incorporates pertinent sociological constructs, employs phenomenologically-grounded measures, and adopts a multidimensional conceptualization of androgyny.

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